



## Department of Connecticut Veterans of Foreign Wars of The United States

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Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, and members of the Veterans Affairs Committee,

My name is Gregory Smith. I served more than 22 years in the United States Army and Navy, retiring in 2005, after having served overseas in several conflicts. I am here today representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Connecticut, of which I am the State Commander.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from the more than 26,000 Connecticut residents who are members of the VFW and our Auxiliaries.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars is grateful for your work as members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and the care and concern you show for Connecticut's military veterans and family members, particularly those who have directly borne the many burdens of war.

The Connecticut VFW supports all of the bills before this committee today. We vigorously support legislation related to student veterans, women veterans, and veterans in need of greater access to mental health services. Today, we specifically would like to draw your attention to our support of:

SB 520 and HB 6779, which are both bills seeking to raise the current 50% tax exemption on military retirement to 100%. The young men and women who join our Nation's military services do not in general do so with even a brief thought about someday being a retired Soldier, Sailor, Airman, or Marine. Service in our Armed Forces, however difficult or dangerous, is a relatively brief experience for most of our country's warriors. For those of us who chose a full military career, I assure you we envisioned no pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. It is no secret that military pay and pensions are low, and thus very worthy of your efforts at protection. Many, if not most, military retirees simply cannot afford to live in Connecticut. When our state loses them, we lose much more than can be seen on a balance sheet. The Veterans of Foreign Wars thanks you for recognizing the value military retirees bring to communities throughout Connecticut.

SB 904, which provides needed outreach to women veterans. The VFW has made great strides to support and address the needs of our Nations' women warriors. We all have much more work to do. Passage of this bill is a critical step Connecticut can take in the right direction.

SB 691 and 905 as well as HB 6391 and 6780, which cover various aspects of the mental health support for veterans. The VFW applauds each of these efforts at supportive legislation.

SB 694, which seeks to provide appropriate and adequate services to veterans on state college and university campuses to improve veterans' education, job placement and well-being. In addition to

providing hundreds of thousands of scholarships each year, the VFW has partnered with Student Veterans of America in their efforts to strengthen facilities geared to their needs at Connecticut colleges and universities. The VFW and the SVA support passage of this bill and others related to today's student veterans.

SB 522, which would close a loophole where nursing homes are not allowing residents to use VA provided medications. If a veteran can get medication for less cost from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, we all win.

HB 6373 enables private employers to give a hiring preference to honorably discharged veterans, spouses of disabled veterans and surviving spouses of honorably discharged veterans. The Veterans of Foreign Wars is proud to endorse this effort.

Lastly, I call your attention to the Rocky Hill Veterans Home resolution submitted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other Veterans Service Organizations in Connecticut. We ask that the Connecticut General Assembly fully-fund the completion of all of the PRI Staff Recommendations, and the 4 key goals recommended in the December 2014 PRI Staff Findings and Recommendations. Further, we ask that a representative from each major Federally Chartered Veterans Service Organization in Connecticut, as recommended by the respective State Commander or President, be appointed to the Rocky Hill Board of Trustees.

Respectfully,



Gregory Smith  
VFW State Commander  
Department of Connecticut